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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the attitudes of 140 students entering a teacher preparation program at West Chester University (Pennsylvania) toward urban and non-urban schools. A 98-item survey instrument was developed containing questions pertaining to various aspects of the teaching-learning environment and was administered to two randomly selected groups of preservice teachers. One group was asked to think of a typical large urban school and to answer questions in response to their perceptions of such a school; the other group was asked to think of a typical school in a non-urban environment. A preliminary analysis of the data suggests that subjects adhere to at least three stereotypes: (1) urban schools have more negative attributes than non-urban schools; (2) non-urban schools are virtually idyllic places in which to teach; and (3) teachers of less prepared students need more knowledge of teaching techniques and less knowledge of subject matter, or conversely, that teachers of good students need less knowledge of teaching techniques and more knowledge of subject matter. The major implication of the research is that undergraduates who intend to become teachers need to develop more realistic expectations about the teaching environment in both urban and non-urban schools. (LL)

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Undergraduates' Attitudes Toward Teaching in Urban and Non-Urban Schools

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INTRODUCTION

Urban education and minority education will be of increasing concern as America moves through the 1990's and beyond, with public school enrollments forecast at over 30% minority by the year 2000. Problems associated with urban education are compounded by the prospective retirement of a large cohort of teachers hired in the 1950's and 1960's. For example, schools in Southeastern Pennsylvania and the City of Philadelphia expect to replace over 50% of their current teacher force over the next seven years. Recruitment and retention of new teachers, particularly for urban schools, will be critical goals during this time.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been several studies over the last decade examining prospective teachers' self-reported motives for wanting to teach (Joseph and Green, 1986; Murnane, 1987; Pigge and Marso, 1988; Roberson, Keith, and Page, 1983). Our view of this research literature did not uncover any sustained effort to assess preservice teacher's individual attitudes about teaching in urban schools. Nor could we find attempts to compare and contrast attitudes about working conditions, student characteristics, and other aspects of urban and non-urban educational settings.

Illustrative of this was a major study in 1987 of a nationally representative sample of seventy-six schools and colleges of

education. In this study education majors were asked to report reasons for selecting the teaching profession. Reasons cited by respondents included "helping children grow and learn" (90%); "seems to be a challenging field" (63%); "like work conditions" (54%) (Teaching teachers, 1987).

Yet this and similar studies (Status of, 1986) did not concentrate on assessment of pre-service teacher's attitudes about teaching in different demographic areas or working with culturally deprived learners. This suggests that the present study may be able to make a contribution to the literature.

METHOD

Survey Instrument

In order to determine the attitudes of students entering a teacher preparation program toward urban and non-urban schools, the researchers prepared and administered a survey instrument containing 98 questions pertaining to various aspects of the teaching-learning environment: students, parents, teaching colleagues, administrators, the school building, the neighborhood, the classroom, and a typical beginning teacher. Each question contained two terms relating to some aspect of schooling and asked the subjects to choose between extreme positions on a Likert Scale from one to five. For example, subjects were asked to think of students in a typical large urban school and to decide if such students would be motivated or unmotivated, with one being

extremely motivated, two being somewhat motivated, three being neutral, four being somewhat unmotivated, and five being extremely unmotivated. The survey instrument asked twenty-seven questions about students, relating to their motivation, academic skills, behavior, and physical and emotional well-being. The sections on fellow teachers contained twelve questions about professional competence and attitudes toward their jobs. The section on parents asked six questions

about parental support for teaching. The section on school administration asked fourteen questions about managerial style, professional competence, and support for teaching. The section on physical environment asked thirty questions about the neighborhood, the school building, and the classroom, focusing on safety, maintenance, and support for teaching. The section on beginning teachers asked nine questions about attitudes of typical first-year teachers.

Subjects

The subjects were 140 undergraduates enrolled in six sections of a beginning course in educational foundations at West Chester University. The survey instrument was administered in the last week of the class, so that the subjects had completed all aspects of the course except the final examination. These preservice education majors fell into the following age groups:

1. 17-19. There were 110 within this group, which was 76.9% of total sample.
2. 20-21. This group consisted of 21 respondents, 14.7% of

the total sample.

3. 22-25. Eight respondents were in this age group accounting for 5.6% of the total sample.
4. 26-30. Two respondents fell into this age bracket, providing 1.4% of the sample.
5. 31 plus. One respondent reported an age of 31 or older, providing .7% of the total sample.

The number of missing cases was one (1).

The class year data were as follows:

1. Respondents identifying themselves as "freshmen" totaled 89, which were 62.2% of the total sample.
2. Respondents indicating a "sophomore" rank numbered 34, or 23.8 percent of those surveyed.
3. Those indicating a "junior" rank numbered 16, or 11.2% of the respondents.
4. Those indicating "senior" status numbered 3, or 2.1% of the sample.

There was one missing case.

Respondents were asked to indicate the type of high school from which they were graduated (Item #101). Replies fell into five categories.

1. Thirteen (9.1%) reported graduating from an urban public school.
2. Seventy-four (51.7%) indicated a suburban public school. 3. Twenty-six (18.2%) selected a rural or small town high school.

4. Twenty-seven (18.9%) graduated from a parochial school.
5. One (.7%) responded to the last choice, "non-religious private school."

There were two missing cases.

When asked if they had ever attended an urban high school, twenty-eight (19.6%) responded "yes," and 11% (79.7%) answered "no." Those reporting that they had attended a suburban high school numbered 103 (72.0%), with 38 (26.6%) reporting they had not attended a suburban high school. Fifty respondents (35.0%) indicated that they had attended a rural school, while 92 (64.3%) reported that they had not attended a rural school. Items treating urban and rural school attendance each had one missing case, while the item on suburban attendance had two missing cases.

When asked where they planned to teach, 19 (13.3%) selected an urban public school. The majority, 86 (60.1%) selected a suburban public school. Eight (5.6%) plan to teach in a parochial school. Four (2.8%) selected a non-religious private school. Nine (6.3%) of the preservice students indicated no preference in terms of where they plan to teach.

As to grade level they would prefer to teach, most students (62) selected high school, defined as grades nine through twelve. Second in preference (43) was early elementary (K-3). Twenty-one students selected upper elementary (grades 4-6). Eight preferred middle school (grades 6-8). Nine students reported no preference as to level.

When asked what type of students they would prefer to work

with, respondents indicated a strong preference for "normal" students. Eighty-five of the 143 people responding to this item chose "normal" students. Twenty-one chose "gifted" students. Fifteen preferred to work with students with handicapping conditions. Only seven students elected to work with culturally deprived students, while fifteen indicated the type of students did not matter to them.

Respondents were also asked to note the social class of students they would prefer to work with. Those responding to "upper class" numbered 16 (11.2%). Those selecting "middle class" numbered 77 (53.8%), while those selecting "lower class" numbered 16 (11.2%). Thirty-four respondents (23.8%) indicated no social class preference. When asked about the ethnic background of students they would prefer to work with, 81 or 56.6% selected "white" students. One, or .7% selected "African-American, and similarly three (2.1%) indicated a preference for Hispanic or Latino students.

Preservice education majors taking the attitude survey were largely elementary education (or early childhood education) students. Next in frequency were "science/math/social science/English/foreign language majors" (41). There were 27 music/fine arts majors. The survey sample consisted of 103 females and 38 males. Most identified themselves as "white" 97.2%. Two reported their ethnic identity as "hispanic or Latino," while one reported "African-American."

Task

Each section of the foundations course was randomly divided into two groups, and each group was given the same survey instrument. One group was asked to think of a typical large urban school (New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago were used as examples), and to answer the 98 questions in response to their perceptions of such a school. The other group used the same survey instrument, but was asked to think of a typical school in a non-urban environment. This group was told that any school not in a large city would qualify; specifically, they were told to think of a typical suburban school, a typical rural school, or a typical small-town school.

Design and Analysis

This experiment was designed to give some preliminary answers to the question of whether or not beginning students who have chosen teaching as a career perceive urban schools as being different from other schools and, if so, where they think those differences occur. Do they think that students in an urban school are different from non-urban students in terms of academic skills, behavior, and attitudes? Do they feel that urban students require special subject matter and/or teaching techniques? Do they feel that beginning teachers need different competencies to be successful in an urban environment? Are parents of urban and non-

urban students perceived as being equally concerned with the education of their children and equally supportive of teaching? Do beginning undergraduate education majors feel there are differences between urban and non-urban teachers in terms of professional competence and collegiality? Are administrators in urban and non-urban schools perceived as equally supportive? Do students beginning their

teacher preparation perceive differences in the physical environments of urban and non-urban schools, and do they feel that perceived differences will influence the teaching-learning process? In order to answer these questions, the study was addressed to testing the validity of ten hypotheses. They are as follows:

Hypothesis One: Urban students will be perceived as less motivated that non-urban students.

Hypothesis Two: Urban students will be perceived as having fewer academic skills that non-urban students.

Hypothesis Three: Urban students will be perceived as needing more discipline that non-urban students.

Hypothesis Four: Urban parents will be perceived as less supportive of education than non-urban parents.

Hypothesis Five: Urban teachers will be perceived as less professionally competent than non-urban teachers.

Hypothesis Six: Urban teachers will be perceived as feeling less positive toward their jobs than non-urban teachers.

Hypothesis Seven: Urban administrators will be perceived as less democratic in managerial style than non-urban administrators.

Hypothesis Eight: Urban administrators will be perceived as less supportive of teachers than non-urban administrators.

Hypothesis Nine: The physical environment (neighborhood, school building, and classroom) of urban schools will be perceived as less conducive to learning than that of non-urban schools.

Hypothesis Ten: First-year teachers in an urban school will be perceived as feeling less satisfied with teaching than first-year teachers in a non-urban school.

A detailed statistical analysis of the data is currently under way. The next section of this paper will present the results of a preliminary analysis. In performing this preliminary analysis, the researchers looked at responses to each question and, for that question, combined all responses of one and two on the Likert Scale, ignored all responses of three, combined all responses of four and five, and computed percentages of the combined responses. For example, all responses of urban students being "extremely motivated" and "somewhat motivated" (responses one and two on the Likert Scale) were added together and that sum computed as a percentage of all responses to the question of urban students' motivation. Similarly, all responses of "somewhat unmotivated" and "extremely unmotivated" (responses four and five on the Likert Scale) were added together and that sum computed as a percentage of all responses to the question of urban students' motivation. The results of the preliminary analysis reported in the next section will ignore neutral

responses and only compare percentages of positive and negative

attitudes.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One: Urban students will be perceived as less motivated than non-urban students. This was supported by the results of the experiment. Only 16% of the subjects felt that urban students were extremely motivated or somewhat motivated, while 58% of the subjects felt this of non-urban students. Similarly, 45% of the subjects felt that urban students were somewhat or extremely unmotivated, while only 3% felt that way about non-urban students. Likewise, 18% felt that urban students were prepared to work in school, as opposed to 62% who felt that non-urban students were prepared to work. Nineteen percent (19%) of the subjects felt that urban students liked school, and 16% felt urban students liked their teachers. In contrast, 40% of the subjects felt non-urban students liked school, and 47% felt non-urban students liked their teachers. Forty-six percent (46%) felt urban students hated school to some degree, and 42% felt these students disliked their teachers. Again, in contrast, only 13% felt non-urban students hated school to some degree, and only 13% felt these students disliked their teachers.

Hypothesis Two: Urban students will be perceived as having fewer academic skills than non-urban students. This hypothesis was supported by the results of the experiment. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the subjects felt that urban students had basic

academic skills, while 67% felt that non-urban students had those skills. Moreover, 37% felt urban students lacked basic academic skills, as compared with only 3% who felt that non-urban students lacked those skills. Forty-one percent (41%) felt urban students needed special materials; 47% felt they needed special subject matter; 48% felt they needed special teaching techniques; and 72% felt they needed special attention. In contrast, only 13% of the subjects felt non-urban students needed special materials, 23% that they needed special subject matter, 20% that they needed special teaching techniques, and 27% that they needed special attention.

Hypothesis Three: Urban students will be perceived as needing more discipline than non-urban students. This hypothesis was supported by the results of the experiment. Sixteen percent (16%) of the subjects felt urban students were well-disciplined, 14% that they were well-behaved, and 77% that urban students needed more discipline. Similarly, 60% felt urban students were undisciplined; 68% felt they were rowdy; and only 7% felt that such students did not need additional discipline. In sharp contrast, 68% of the subjects felt non-urban students were well-disciplined, 55% that they were well-behaved, and less than 8% felt that non-urban students were either undisciplined or rowdy.

Hypothesis Four: Urban parents will be perceived as less supportive of education than non-urban parents. This hypothesis was supported by the results of the experiment. Only 24% of the subjects felt that urban parents cared about their children's education, while 47% felt that they did not care. In contrast, 72%

of the subjects felt that non-urban parents cared, while only 5% felt that non-urban parents did not care. In addition, 25% of the subjects felt that urban parents supported teachers, 17% that urban parents helped the educational process, 36% that urban parents valued education, and 29% that urban parents encouraged their children. These numbers contrast with 70% of the subjects who felt that non-urban parents supported teachers, 62% who felt that non-urban parents helped the educational process, 80% who felt that non-urban parents valued education, and 78% who felt that non-urban parents encouraged their children. Twenty-five (25%) of the subjects actually felt that urban parents hindered the education process. Another 25% felt that urban parents did not value education, and 17% felt they discouraged their children. In contrast, fewer than 7% of the subjects felt that non-urban parents hindered the educational process; fewer than 2% felt that non-urban parents did not value education; and none felt that non-urban parents discouraged their children.

Hypothesis Five: Urban teachers will be perceived as less professionally competent than non-urban teachers. This hypothesis was given some support, but less support than the previous hypotheses. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the subjects felt typical urban teachers were competent, 59% that they were well-educated, and 52% that they behaved in a professional manner. Only 7% of the subjects felt urban teachers likely to be poorly educated, 11% that they were somewhat incompetent, and 16% that they were likely to behave in an unprofessional manner. These

numbers indicate favorable attitudes toward urban teachers, but slightly less favorable than attitudes toward non-urban teachers. Eighty percent (80%) of the subjects felt that the latter were competent; only 3% felt they were incompetent. Seventy-five percent (75%) felt non-urban teachers were well-educated; none felt they were poorly educated. Seventy-five percent (75%) felt non-urban teachers behaved in a professional manner, with only 5% feeling they were likely to behave in an unprofessional manner.

Hypothesis Six: Urban teachers will be perceived as feeling less positive toward their jobs than non-urban teachers. This hypothesis was supported by the results of the experiment. Forty-nine percent (49%) of the subjects felt that urban teachers were highly likely or somewhat likely to be burned out, as opposed to only 8% of the subjects who felt that way about non-urban teachers. Similarly, 34% felt urban teachers highly likely or somewhat likely to be unhappy, and 37% felt them to be highly or somewhat likely to be embittered. These percentages contrast with 5% of the subjects who felt non-urban teachers even somewhat likely to be unhappy, 8% who felt non-urban teachers somewhat or highly likely to be burned out, and 5% who felt them at all likely to be embittered.

Hypothesis Seven: Urban administrators will be perceived as less democratic in managerial style. This hypothesis was given some support by the results of the experiment. Seventeen percent (17%) of the subjects felt urban administrators likely to be democratic; 18% felt that them likely to behave in a reasonable, as opposed to an arbitrary manner; 31% felt that they were fair, and

23% felt them to be collegial. Forty-six percent (46%) of the subjects felt that urban administrators were likely to behave in an arbitrary, as opposed to a reasonable manner. In contrast, 42% of the subjects felt that non-urban administrators behaved in a democratic manner, 28% that non-urban administrators were reasonable as opposed to arbitrary, 54% that they were fair, and 28% that they were collegial. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the subjects felt that urban administrators were somewhat likely or highly likely to be dictatorial, while only 27% felt that to be true of non-urban administrators. In addition, only 17% of the subjects felt non-urban administrators likely to be arbitrary as opposed to reasonable.

Hypothesis Eight: Urban administrators will be perceived as less supportive of teachers than non-urban administrators. This hypothesis was supported by the results of the experiment. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the subjects felt urban administrators likely to help the educational process, as opposed to 59% of the subjects who felt that way about non-urban administrators. Likewise, 25% of the subjects felt that urban administrators were somewhat or highly likely to interfere with teachers, while only 7% felt that of non-urban administrators. In addition, only 33% felt urban administrators would provide resources, while 35% felt them not likely to do so. In contrast, 68% of the subjects felt non-urban administrators likely to provide resources, and only 7% felt them not likely to do so.

Hypothesis Nine: The physical environment (neighborhood,

school building, and classroom) of urban schools will be perceived as less conducive to learning than that of non-urban schools. This hypothesis was supported by the results of the experiment. Less than 2% of the subjects felt that the neighborhood around a non-urban school was even somewhat likely to be dangerous. Similarly, less than 7% felt the building in a non-urban school to be even somewhat likely to be dangerous, and less than 2% that the classroom would be somewhat likely to be dangerous. In sharp contrast, 71% of the subjects felt an urban neighborhood somewhat or highly likely to be dangerous, 52% that the school building was likely to be dangerous, and 18% that the classroom itself somewhat or highly likely to be dangerous in an urban school. Subjects had similar contrasts in their expectations about maintenance. Seventeen percent (17%) felt an urban school building would be clean and well-maintained, 60% that it would be dirty, and 53% that it would be in disrepair. Seventy-three percent (73%) felt a non-urban school likely to be clean, 78% that it would be well-maintained, only 8% that it would be dirty, and less than 4% that it would be in disrepair. Thirty-five percent (35%) felt that an urban school building was likely to hinder learning, as opposed to 0% who felt that way about a non-urban school building. Thirty-five percent (35%) also felt the classroom itself likely to hinder learning in an urban school, with 0% feeling that about a non-urban school. Fifty-five percent (55%) of the subjects felt that the neighborhood around an urban school was likely to hinder learning, while 65% felt that the neighborhood around a non-urban school was

likely to be conducive to learning.

Hypothesis Ten: First-year teachers in an urban school will be perceived as being less satisfied with teaching than first-year teachers in a non-urban school. This hypothesis was supported by the results of the experiment. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the subjects felt that a new teacher in an urban school was likely to become discouraged, while only 27% felt that way about a new teacher in a non-urban school. Forty-three percent (43%) felt a new urban teacher was likely to quit teaching, while only 17% felt that a beginning non-urban teacher was likely to quit. Twenty-three (23%) of the subjects felt that a new teacher in an urban school would be happy, 27% that he or she would be unhappy. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the subjects felt a new teacher in a non-urban school would be happy, and only 5% felt he or she likely to be unhappy. When asked to rank order five things needed by a new teacher in an urban setting, subjects ranked knowledge of teaching techniques first (40%) with knowledge of subject matter second (24%). For the non-urban school, knowledge of subject matter was ranked first (42%), with teaching techniques second (30%).

DISCUSSION

The researchers would like to emphasize the preliminary nature of the results reported here and to express a note of caution about overgeneralizing from this data. First of all, the survey instrument was intended merely to suggest preliminary answers to

the question of whether or not undergraduates beginning their professional preparation as teachers perceived urban schools as different from non-urban schools. The answer suggested by the data would seem to be a definite yes they do, and furthermore, that they see differences across every dimension tested: between students, teachers, parents, administrators, neighborhood, school building, classroom, and beginning teachers. However, the survey instrument did not specify which type of non-urban school the subjects were to consider. Therefore whether they were thinking of rural schools or suburban schools or small town schools is an open question and one that could provide a fruitful area for additional research. It is certainly possible that some subjects did not think about a typical non-urban school, but rather an ideal non-urban school. Similarly, when subjects were asked to think of an urban school, the possibility of stereotypical thinking needs to be considered when analyzing their responses. And thus, it is possible that the results may not reflect accurately what the subjects think is actually true, but rather what they would like to be true.

Moreover, this experiment did not consider questions of race or ethnicity. Ninety-nine percent (99%) of the subjects were white, but nothing was said overtly about race or ethnicity in the survey instrument. Did subjects equate urban with African-American or other minority students? If so, would they feel the same about non-minority students in an urban school? Was non-urban equated with white? If so, would subjects feel the same about minority students in a non-urban school? These are questions open to

further investigation. And again we suggest caution about overgeneralizing the results.

Although all hypotheses were supported and although subjects saw differences across all dimensions of education that were tested, the researchers noted with interest that subjects saw the fewest differences between the professional staff members of urban and non-urban schools. For example, most subjects did not question the professional competency and education of administrators. Rather, most questioned the ability of urban administrators to deliver support to teachers--a factor, which, if true, might be an aspect of the physical environment of the school instead of an aspect of administration per se. Likewise, subjects reported the biggest difference in their perceptions between urban and non-urban teachers in terms of job satisfaction rather than ability or education. Subjects recorded the biggest differences in their perceptions between urban and non-urban students, between urban and non-urban parents, and between urban and non-urban physical environments.

ln any event, these data suggest that most of the subjects believed numerous social stereotypes about the urban school environment: that students are likely to be under-prepared academically, to have poor attitudes toward school, to be in need of discipline, to have parents who do not support teachers, etc. In addition, a majority of the subjects assumed that a typical urban school building was in disrepair, located in an unsafe neighborhood, and was itself a dangerous place in which to be.

These findings may have some relationship to the portrayal of urban schools in television and the popular press.

The finding that was unexpected--and perhaps the most important thing revealed by the preliminary data analysis--was the highly idealized, almost rose colored view that most subjects had about non-urban schools. It was not just that this group of aspiring teachers felt that non-urban schools were different from urban schools, but that they had such unrealistic beliefs about conditions in non-urban schools, e.g. only 3% feeling that typical students were somewhat unmotivated, only 7% that typical students were unprepared to work, over 53% that typical students were eager to learn, etc. In addition, subjects assumed that urban students, most of whom were seen as unprepared academically, would be more likely to need special materials, methods, etc. and that non-urban students who were seen as more motivated, more prepared, etc. would not need special materials and methods. Therefore, these data suggest that these undergraduates beginning their professional preparation as teachers adhere to at least three stereotypes: one, that urban schools have more negative attributes than non-urban schools; two, that non-urban schools are virtually idyllic places in which to teach; and, three, that teachers of less prepared students need more knowledge of teaching techniques and less knowledge of subject matter, or, conversely, that teachers of good students need less knowledge of teaching techniques and more knowledge of subject matter. The experience of the researchers would call into question all three of these beliefs. Whether or

not urban schools differ dramatically from non-urban schools is an empirical question that this research does not attempt to answer. Nevertheless documentation that suburban and rural schools both suffer social problems abounds. Drug abuse, crime, teenage pregnancy, and suicide are becoming more frequent in non-urban areas, prompting concern that prospective teachers learn of these phenomena. Thus, the experience of the researchers suggests that the issues are more complex than the subjects seem to think.

IMPLICATIONS

The major implication is that undergraduates who intend to become teachers need to develop more realistic expectations about the teaching environment in both urban and non-urban schools. Stereotypes need to be corrected. Many subjects of this experiment tend to view urban schools too negatively, and non-urban schools too positively. Moreover, they tend to undervalue pedagogical techniques needed when dealing with what they assume will be well-prepared students. Programmatically, this all suggests that the field experience component of teacher preparation is of paramount importance and that aspiring teachers need to spend time observing both urban and non-urban schools. Others have echoed the need for teacher education that is more multicultural. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education recently stated that:

> "Colleges and Universities engaged in the preparation of teachers have a central role in the positive development of our culturally pluralistic society. If cultural pluralism is to become an integral part of the

> educational process, teachers and personnel must be prepared in an environment where commitment to multicultural education is evident. Evidence of this commitment includes such factors as a faculty and staff of multiethnic and multiracial character, a student body that is representative of the culturally diverse nature of the community being served, and a culturally pluralistic curriculum that accurately represents the diverse multicultural nature of American society." (Kelly, James Jr., et al.)

The call for this type of education may be timely, given the attitudes of prospective teachers discussed above. The researchers believe that if perspective teachers develop realistic expectations about the teaching environment, they will increase their probability of success in the classroom and the likelihood of their remaining in teaching.

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